**Stakeholder engagement**

Africa RISING is a research for development (R4D) program that aims at providing pathways out of poverty for smallholder farmer households through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base. Sustainable intensification delivered through five mutually reinforcing domains of Productivity, Economics, Environment, Human condition (nutrition, food security, and capacity) and Social environment are the technical framework for delivering on this purpose. The Program, now entering its second phase, has been implemented via a network of partners who constitute its R4D community of practice in West, Eastern and Southern Africa, and the Ethiopian Highlands.

In Phase 1, participatory research approaches were used to engage farmers and a broad range of stakeholders - national research institutes, civil society, the private sector, international organizations and policy makers - in R4D processes. Stakeholder engagement was used to identify and clarify research problems, implement the research and learning agenda and provide feedback to stakeholders, albeit with major focus on farmers. A key lesson learnt in Phase 1 was that collaboration and partnerships, among institutions and with individuals, in general carry risk. It was noted that partnerships are demanding, requiring time, pooling of resources, formal memoranda, risk sharing, and shared management. These issues permeate, through the life of any collaboration from need identification through implementation, risk management and exit. The program therefore will ensure partnerships are well managed for results in a manner that engenders mutual accountability and effectiveness.

Thus in Phase 2, participatory approaches will underpin our R4D agenda, in planning, priority setting, execution and mutual learning involving different stakeholders and farmers. This will ensure farmers and stakeholders (partners) are not overburdened by research activities; and their their knowledge, experiences and resources will be leveraged for greater outcomes. The Program will also equip partners with skills, knowledge and technologies to improve their productivity and operations. These investments by Africa RISING will underpin the Programs’ knowledge and technology dissemination and learning network. The strategy will minimize redundancies, add value, leverage opportunities resident with partners and complimentary projects for solutions to common problems in the Africa RISING zone of influence. The R4D/Innovation Platforms will remain as the critical framework for engaging multi- stakeholders among others.

Overall, building on lessons learnt from Phase 1, the Program in Phase 2 will reinforce its R4D agenda by deploying effective and efficient participatory research approaches. The Program remains committed to dialogue, information sharing, action planning and implementation in its R4D activities in all the zones of influence in Eastern, Southern and West Africa, and the Ethiopian Highlands. A framework and standards to guide partnership formation and management has been developed (**Annex 1 Framework, Annex 2 Engagement standards**) to strengthen demand-driven research and impact.